



CFSA Fact Sheet



Child Abuse and Neglect Are National Tragedies

Child abuse and neglect are tragedies of vast proportions in the U.S. In 2001 (the most recent year for which data are available):

- Public agencies received 3 million reports of abuse/neglect concerning 5 million children.
- Agencies screened in 67 percent of these reports.
- Of reports screened in, agencies identified a child victim or child at risk 28 percent of the time.
- Some 903,000 children were abused or neglected, and 1,300 died as a result.
- More than 80 percent of these youngsters were abused by a parent.¹

Too Many Children at Risk

Since the 1960s when physicians first identified “battered child syndrome,” risk factors for child abuse and neglect in the U.S. have become well documented (see box).

At the same time, social problems continue to place children at risk. In 2000, the District greatly exceeded national rates for children living in neighborhoods with . . .

- High poverty (above 18.6%): U.S. = 23%, D.C. = 62%.
- Males not in the labor force (above 38.1%): U.S. = 14%, D.C. = 58%.
- Female-headed families (above 35.2%): U.S. = 17%, D.C. = 81%.²

Experts believe that many instances of child abuse and neglect are never reported. It is safe to assume that the thousands of children and teens known to CFSA at any given time represent only a portion of all the child victims, and those at risk, in the District.

Risk Factors for Child Abuse and Neglect

Community/societal

- ✕ High crime rate
- ✕ Lack of or few social services
- ✕ High poverty rate
- ✕ High unemployment rate

Parent-related

- ✕ Personal history of physical or sexual abuse as a child
- ✕ Teenage parents
- ✕ Single parent
- ✕ Emotional immaturity
- ✕ Poor coping skills
- ✕ Low self-esteem
- ✕ Personal history of substance abuse
- ✕ Known history of child abuse
- ✕ Lack of social support
- ✕ Domestic violence
- ✕ Lack of parenting skills
- ✕ Lack of preparation for extreme stress of having a new infant
- ✕ History of depression or other mental health problems
- ✕ Multiple young children
- ✕ Unwanted pregnancy
- ✕ Denial of pregnancy

Child-related

- ✕ Prematurity
- ✕ Low birth weight
- ✕ Handicap

Source: National Research Council, Panel on Research on Child Abuse and Neglect reported in American Family Physician, American Academy of Family Physicians, Mar. 15, 1999, www.aafp.org

¹ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families' National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information

² Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count 2003 Data Book Online, www.aecf.org

Local Child Victims

Between August 1, 2002, and July 31, 2003, CFSA documented abuse and/or neglect of 2,609 District children.³ These substantiations included:

- 2,126 instances of neglect (81%).
- 566 instances of physical or psychological abuse (22%).
- 152 instances of sexual abuse (6%).

The numbers above exceed 100 percent as a result of multiple findings for some children.

The five most frequent findings regarding neglect, in descending order, were:

- Parental substance abuse.
- Lack of supervision.
- Failure of a child to attend school regularly (educational neglect).
- Inadequate shelter.
- Children left alone.

The two most common findings regarding physical abuse, in descending order, included:

- Hitting.
- Failure to protect.

The top findings regarding sexual abuse, in descending order, were:

- Failure to protect.
- Fondling.
- Exposure to adult sexuality.

³ All statistics in this section are from CFSA's FACES automated case management system.